

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 000043

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

OFFICIAL INFORMAL

FOR SA/INS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [AMGT](#) [CE](#) [MV](#)

SUBJECT: OFFICIAL INFORMAL NUMBER 003 (01/09/04)

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED - PROTECT ACCORDINGLY.

CONTENTS: PARLIAMENT TO PROBE SAFEHOUSE RAID
- PRESIDENT SHUFFLES DEPARTMENTS TO NEW MINISTRY
- COMMITTEE TO STUDY ANTI-CONVERSION LEGISLATION
- PRIVATE SECTOR READY TO JOIN THE FRAY - BUT HOW?
- ROGER WINTER VISIT

PARLIAMENT TO PROBE SAFEHOUSE RAID

1. (U) FYI. On January 8, Parliament passed a motion to appoint a parliamentary select committee to examine the differences between the findings of two reports on the 2002 police raid of a Sri Lanka Army safehouse. As reported in 03 Colombo 2121, a retired judge commissioned by President Kumaratunga to probe into the raid released findings that indirectly blamed the PM, his assistants, and several ministers of being aware of the raid but doing nothing to stop it. (Note: An Army court of inquiry issued a report in 2002 that found no evidence of high-level government official foreknowledge of the raid, in contradiction to the subsequent report by the Presidential Commission.) The motion to establish the committee passed despite opposition from the President's People's Alliance (PA) party, as well as the extremist Marxist Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP). (POL)

PRESIDENT SHUFFLES DEPARTMENTS TO NEW MINISTRY

2. (U) On January 2, President Kumaratunga issued a gazette notification removing five departments -- Prisons, Immigration and Emigration, Registration of Persons, Registration of Persons of Indian Origin, and Census and Statistics -- from the Ministry of Defense, and transferring them to the newly-created Ministry of Internal Security. (Note: As reported in 03 Colombo 2179, the Internal Security Ministry was established by the President on December 19. At that time, the majority of departments in the old Interior Ministry were moved to the Defense Ministry, leaving the newly created Interior Security Ministry with only the police departments.) Although the Census Department is listed as being removed from the Defense Ministry in the January 2 gazette, it does not show up on the list of departments added to the Internal Security Ministry. Mission has spoken to the government printer who assures us this is merely a technical glitch. Moving these portfolios back to the "Interior" (now renamed) ministry corrects one of the obvious oddities about the December 19 move and underscores that the exercise had a "poorly thought out" air about it. (POL)

COMMITTEE TO STUDY ANTI-CONVERSION LEGISLATION

3. (U) FYI. In response to the fasting protest of Buddhist monks over the need for "anti-conversion" legislation, Buddhist Affairs Minister Lokubandara agreed to set up a committee of Buddhist clergy to consult on such proposed legislation. This 31-member committee, which includes clergy from around the island and representatives of all three major Sri Lankan Buddhist sects, is scheduled to have its inaugural meeting on January 9. This committee is in addition to the interfaith ministerial committee which is also evaluating proposed anti-conversion legislation (see Colombo 3). (POL)

PRIVATE SECTOR READY TO JOIN FRAY - BUT HOW?

4. (U) In a boisterous session yesterday, over 300 high level business reps debated actions to push the PM and CBK toward resolution. The meeting was called by JBIZ, an organization comprised of chambers and business associations that represents the majority of the private sector. Suggestions for actions ranged from strikes, demonstrations and refusal to pay taxes to consensus building, hiring professional lobbyists and meetings with both parties. Another option raised was to hold all Provincial Elections on the same day and use them as a referendum on this issue. Due to the wide range of opinions, it was not surprising

that no course of action was decided. JBIZ was to come up with a plan within 24 hours.

15. (SBU) Comment: Until now, there had been some private sector reaction to the political squabble, including individual meetings with PM and CBK, Chamber of Commerce meetings and some press interviews of business leaders. Though no consensus was reached yesterday, the fact that this sector of civil society, representing a large number of citizens, has come together and is exploring peaceful, but strong, actions to express their frustration with the situation is healthy. If the business sector is as divided as the population appears to be over which side is right and what the final solution should be, however, their entry into the fray may not prompt faster resolution.

ROGER WINTER VISIT

16. (U) As you may be aware, Roger Winter of USAID will visit here the week after next, with trips to Jaffna and Puttulam. The schedule is well in hand. We suggest SA invite Winter over for a general political and policy briefing before his visit. FYI - when AMB and DCM were fellow desk officers in AF/E in the late 1980s, they both worked with Winter, who was then at the U.S. Committee for Refugees.

LUNSTEAD